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Fair board votes to back contract with Marlboro

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DEL MAR — Choosing revenue over reputation, Del Mar Fair officials yesterday endorsed a potentially lucrative contract that could make Marlboro cigarettes a major sponsor at this summer's fair.

By a 5-2 vote, the Del Mar Fair board approved pursuing the estimated \$175,000 contract, despite an impassioned debate over whether the family-oriented fair should involve itself in the controversy over cigarettes.

"Let's stop this dead in its tracks," implored board member Daniel Eaton, a former vice president of the American Lung Association. "We don't need the fair's image tied to this."

But other board members, noting the deal's monetary benefits, said it wasn't their place to pass judgment on cigarette smoking, which is prohibited in all state-run fairgrounds buildings but allowed on the outdoor grounds.

The tentative contract calls for Marlboro to pay for two big-name concerts in the fairgrounds' grandstand on a planned "Latino Day" of the summer fair. In exchange, the fair would allow Marlboro to operate two tobacco shops on the fairgrounds that would sell cigarettes and cigars.

In addition, Marlboro would staff kiosks in the fair's 10 beer gardens, selling lighters, T-shirts and other items with the Marlboro logo. Marlboro would also operate an outdoor cooking grill and feature its own cookbook.

In the past, the only way to buy cigarettes at the fair was from coin-operated machines in the beer gardens, which are open only to those 21 and older, fair officials said.

Eaton predicted that the potential contract would bring bad publicity to the fair. He said the American Lung Association already has filed a complaint with officials at the fairgrounds' horse-racing track over public exposure to cigarette smoke there.

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